



FACT SHEET

Emergency Response Action Steps:

The following actions will help individuals determine actions they should consider taking before, during and after a disaster event.

1. DISASTER ALERT: If you have advanced warning:

- People come first. Provide assistance. Note needs of people with disabilities.
- Move or secure vital records/high priority items if it can be done safely.
- Screw plywood over windows or use tape to reduce shattering.
(**Please Note:** Taping windows to prevent flying glass is not a recommended practice.)
- Verify master switch shut-off (water, gas, electricity) by trained staff.
- Move items away from windows and below-ground storage into water-resistant areas:
 - Flooding: move items to higher floors.
 - Hurricane: avoid areas under roof.
- Wrap shelves, cabinets, other storage units in heavy plastic sealed with waterproof tape.
- Move outdoor objects indoors or secure.
- Take with you lists of staff, institutional/public officials, insurance and financial data, inventory, emergency plan and supplies.
- Appoint a staff contact to give instructions on returning to work.

2. SAFETY FIRST!

- Remain calm, reassuring. Alert staff to potential hazards.

- Look for loose or downed power lines. Avoid area. Report problems to local utility.
- Look for electrical system damage: sparks, broken/frayed wires, smell of burning insulation. Turn off electricity at main switch if you can without risk.
- Shut off water.
- If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing, open a window and immediately leave the building. Turn off gas at main valve if trained to do so. Call gas company at once.
- DO NOT REENTER THE BUILDING until declared safe by security or emergency management officials.

3. GETTING STARTED OFF SITE

- Gather staff off-site to assign tasks and review salvage priorities. Create a team big enough for the work.
- Establish a "Command Center" with office equipment (computers, photocopier) and communications tools (walkie-talkies, cellular phones).
- Create a secure salvage area with locks, fans, tables, shelves, plastic sheeting, drying materials and clean water.
- Notify emergency officials of the extent of damage. Contact peer institutions or professional groups for help.
- Appoint a media liaison to report conditions and need for help/volunteers. You may have to limit access to collections.
- Verify financial resources: amount and terms of insurance, government assistance, potential outside funding.
- Contact service providers for generator, freezer, drying or freeze-drying services and refrigerated trucking.
- Arrange for repairs to security system.

4. STABILIZE THE BUILDING & ENVIRONMENT

- Some building contents may be contaminated. Do not enter without current tetanus shots, protective gloves/clothing, hard hat and NIOSH-approved respiratory mask.
- Identify and repair structural hazards. Brace shelves. Remove debris from floor.
- Reduce temperature and relative humidity at once to prevent mold outbreak. Ideal targets are less than 70° F/45% RH.

- If warm outside, use coldest air conditioning setting; cover broken windows with plastic.
- In cool, low-humidity weather open windows, use circulating fans. If mold is already present, do not circulate air.
- Do not turn on heat unless required for human comfort.
- Remove standing water and empty items containing water; remove wet carpets and furnishings.
- If everything is soaked, use commercial dehumidification except in historic buildings.
- Purchase needed supplies.

5. DOCUMENTATION

- Once it is safe to enter the building, make a preliminary tour of all affected areas. Wear protective clothing.
- Do not move objects or collections without documenting their condition.
- Use a Polaroid-type camera or video camera to record conditions of collections and structure. Make sure images clearly record damage. Supplement with better quality photos when necessary.
- Make notes and voice recordings to accompany photographs.
- Assign staff to keep written records of contacts with insurance agents and other investigators, and staff decisions on retrieval and salvage.
- Make visual, written and voice records for each step of salvage procedures.

6. RETRIEVAL & PROTECTION

- Leave undamaged items in place if the environment is stable and area secure. If not, move them to a secure, environmentally controlled area.
- If no part of the building is dry, protect all objects with loose plastic sheeting.
- When moving collections, give priority to undamaged items and those on-loan. Separate undamaged from damaged items.
- Until salvage begins, maintain each group in the same condition you found it; i.e., keep wet items wet, dry items dry, and damp items damp.
- Retrieve all pieces of broken objects and label them.

- Check items daily for mold. If mold is found, handle objects with extreme care and isolate them.

7. DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

- Notify insurance representative or risk manager. You may need an on-site evaluation before taking action.
- Make a rough estimate of the type of materials affected and the extent and nature of damage. A detailed evaluation can slow recovery now.
- Look for threats to worker safety or collections. Determine status of security systems.
- Look for evidence of mold. Note how long the materials have been wet and the current inside temperature and relative humidity.
- SEE DOCUMENTATION SECTION. Documenting the damage is essential for insurance and will help you with recovery.

8. SALVAGE PRIORITIES

Establish salvage priorities by groups of materials, not item-by-item. A library might use subject areas or call numbers; an archives, record groups; and a museum, material groupings.

Focus first protection efforts and salvage work on:

1. Vital institutional information; employee and accounting records, accession lists, shelflist and database backups.
2. Items on loan from individuals or other institutions.
3. Collections that most directly support the institution's mission.
4. Collections that are unique, most used, most vital for research, most representative of subject areas, least replaceable or most valuable.
5. Items most prone to continued damage if untreated.
6. Materials most likely to be successfully salvaged.

9. HISTORIC BUILDINGS: General Tips

- Contact architectural conservators, historic preservation agencies, FEMA, and/or structural engineers before cleanup, especially for buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Follow the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties (pp.17-59).

- Remove standing water from basement and crawl spaces. Contact a structural engineer before pumping water; pumping can collapse foundation when groundwater is high.
- Remove flood-soaked insulation, wallboard and non-historic wall coverings. Support loose plaster with plywood and wood "T" braces.
- Clean historic elements first. Use non-abrasive household cleansers.
- If you treat non-historic features, do not harm historic elements.
- Inventory found items, loose decorative elements, furnishings and collections. Save for reuse or as restoration models.
- Air dry with good ventilation. Never use systems that pump in super-dry air.

[Recovering From and Coping With Flood Damaged Property](#)

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This information is from the Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, a sliding chart designed for archives, libraries, and museums. It is also a useful tool for home or business and is available in English and Spanish versions. The Wheel was produced by the [Heritage Emergency National Task Force](#), a public-private partnership sponsored by FEMA and [Heritage Preservation](#). For further information or to order the Wheel, please call toll-free 1-888-979-2233.